

Deepfakes and Disinformation: Exploring the Impact of Synthetic Political Video on Deception, Uncertainty, and Trust in News

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Abstract

Artificial Intelligence (AI) now enables the mass creation of what have become known as “deepfakes”: synthetic videos that closely resemble real videos. Integrating theories about the power of visual communication and the role played by uncertainty in undermining trust in public discourse, we explain the likely contribution of deepfakes to online disinformation. Administering novel experimental treatments to a large representative sample of the United Kingdom population allowed us to compare people’s evaluations of deepfakes. We find that people are more likely to feel uncertain than to be misled by deepfakes, but this resulting uncertainty, in turn, reduces trust in news on social media. We conclude that deepfakes may contribute toward generalized indeterminacy and cynicism, further intensifying recent challenges to online civic culture in democratic societies.